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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 09 TEL AVIV 001376

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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1. Mideast](#)
- [2. US-Israel Relations](#)
- [3. Trial of Former Liberian President Charles Taylor](#)

Key stories in the media:

The electronic media reported that today, President Moshe Katsav invited Acting PM Ehud Olmert today to form a government. Maariv quoted Olmert as saying at a meeting with Kadima members that he will present his government by the end of April. Israel Radio reported that Kadima is striving to form a broad-based coalition of 84 Knesset members that would include Kadima, the Labor Party, Shas, Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu, the Gil Pensioners' Party, and United Torah Judaism. Should such a government be created, there would be one cabinet minister for three-and-a-half Knesset members, and the government would comprise 23 to 25 ministers. Israel Radio quoted senior Kadima member Haim Ramon as saying that the word "convergence" does not appear on the government's guidelines, but that Olmert's convergence plan did. Ha'aretz reported that a senior Labor Party official warned on Wednesday that the emerging Ehud Olmert government, with the Yisrael Beiteinu faction, "will crumble the moment the convergence [Olmert's political plan] begins." Ha'aretz wrote that the warning came despite a statement made Tuesday by Labor head Amir Peretz at a joint press conference with Olmert that the government could last four years.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that Olmert will convene a meeting on Israel-PA ties early next week. Ha'aretz quoted senior GOI officials in Jerusalem as saying on Wednesday that Israel will cut off all ties with the PA that are not essential for preventing an immediate humanitarian disaster, and that any contact would take place only through those channels intended to prevent a crisis -- which they said was not in the offing. Major media reported that Palestinian PM Ismail Haniyeh told the first meeting of his cabinet on Wednesday that his government is broke and may not be able to pay tens of thousands of public workers this month, which Ha'aretz said was the first admission by Hamas that it will have difficulty running the West Bank and the Gaza Strip without massive foreign aid. The Jerusalem Post reported that a source close to Haniyeh told the newspaper that Haniyeh told his ministers on Wednesday that they would be allowed to maintain contacts with Israeli officials to discuss the day-to-day affairs of the Palestinian population. Israel Radio and other electronic media reported that this morning, the Shin Bet detained Hamas Minister for Jerusalem Affairs Khaled Abu Arfa while he was on his way to Azzariyeh near East Jerusalem, where he was planned to inaugurate a new office. His bodyguard was detained as well. Ha'aretz's web site quoted Israeli security sources as saying that Abu Arfa was detained because he was trying to enter the Palestinian territories with an Israeli ID card, which he holds as

an East Jerusalem resident.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a member of the IDF General Staff told the newspaper this week that Hamas's refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist and its continued support for terror activity have granted the IDF the legal right to target and strike the Hamas Palestinian leadership.

Ha'aretz reported that in the letter he sent UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Tuesday, Palestinian PM

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Mahmoud Zahar wrote that Israel's actions are undermining hopes of achieving an agreement and peace based on the two-state solution. Yediot quoted EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana as saying Wednesday before the European Parliament in Strasbourg that the EU does not want the Hamas government to fail, and that it should be allowed to modify its approach to Israel. The Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli Foreign Ministry Spokesman Mark Regev as saying that Israel "welcomed" Solana's statement that Hamas had clearly not met the benchmarks established by the international community. The Jerusalem Post reported that responding to Solana's call for Israel to transfer revenue payments to the PA, Regev asked, "Can anyone guarantee that money that is transferred today to the Hamas-controlled treasury will not come back to haunt us in the future in the form of suicide bombings?" Israel Radio cited a statement by the Chinese Foreign Ministry that China has no intention of hosting Zahar and the delegation he will lead on a tour of Asian countries. The Jerusalem Post reported that France is considering issuing a visa to a Hamas representative invited to attend a meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Strasbourg on April 10.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Wednesday, various Palestinian organizations and individuals filed a petition with the High Court of Justice demanding an immediate opening of the Karni crossing "for regular, sufficient, and predictable hours" to enable orderly and proper passage of goods to and from the Gaza Strip. The Jerusalem Post reported that UN officials warned Wednesday that poultry supplies, the primary source of protein in the Gaza Strip, were being severely affected by measures implemented to contain the spread of the H5N1 bird flu virus, including recent closures of the Karni crossing by Israel.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Wednesday, Peace Now petitioned the High Court of Justice to force the government to evacuate five illegal outposts within the next two months, as well a sixth outpost by August.

Ha'aretz printed a dispatch by the Israeli news agency Itim that The High Court of Justice has decided not to interfere with Beersheva Mayor Yaakov Turner's decision last week to ban a Machsom Watch photo exhibit at the Teacher's Center in the city. Machsom Watch is a women's group that monitors the behavior of soldiers toward Palestinians at checkpoints. The pictures in question depict interactions at the Qalandya and Hawara checkpoints in the West Bank. Turner announced the ban last Thursday, claiming that the contents of the exhibit are harmful to the sensitivities of the public.

Yediot reported that the national water company Mekorot has removed from its installations in the Ashkelon area large amounts of chlorine that is used in the water purification process. Any damage to the chlorine containers could result in a severe ecological disaster. There are a number of strategic installations situated in the greater Ashkelon area that are within Qassam and Katyusha rocket range.

Yediot bannered a remark made by former FM Silvan Shalom in an interview with the newspaper that Likud head Binyamin Netanyahu "destroyed" his party. Israel Radio reported that there is no majority within the Likud leadership to depose Netanyahu.

Yediot and Ha'aretz reported that IAF Commander Maj. Gen. Eliezer Shkedy decided to dismiss the commander of the Arrow missile program when it was revealed that a "private bank" was operating within his unit. The dismissed officer was a lieutenant colonel. Yediot first uncovered the affair.

Ha'aretz reported that lawyers on behalf of Israel have spoken in a Federal Court in New York in defense of US jurist Prof. Burt Neuborne's demand for a fee for handling claims submitted by Holocaust survivors. Prof. Burt Neuborne is seeking payment of USD 4.1 million, at a rate of USD 700 per hour.

All media reported that on Wednesday, doctors successfully operated on PM Sharon to replace a portion of his skull that was removed during brain surgery following his stroke three months ago.

Maariv reported that on Wednesday, 60 Palestinians from Al-Quds University attended "Imagine - Music and the Media," a conference that took place at Tel Aviv's Hilton Hotel. The renowned musicians Zubin Mehta, Pinchas Zuckerman, and Israeli Arab pianist Salim Abboud-Ashkar also took part in the event.

Maariv reported that on Wednesday, the Municipality of Acre forbade a local association to screen the Palestinian film "Paradise Now," whose subject is suicide bombers. The municipality claimed that the screening would cause unnecessary provocations and harm Jewish-Arab relations in the city.

Israel Radio reported that during his visit to the Vatican today, Shimon Peres, No. 2 in Kadima, is expected to invite Pope Benedict XVI to visit Israel.

All media (lead story in Maariv) reported that State Comptroller Micha Lindenstrauss drafted a severe report on considerable wage excesses at the Bank of Israel. The media reported that AG Menachem Mazuz might investigate the matter. The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio cited a report issued today by the Anti-Defamation League, according to which the rate of anti-Semitic incidents in the US decreased by 3 percent over the last year.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized:
"[Yisrael Beiteinu party leader Avigdor] Lieberman ... has no place in the government."

Palestinian columnist Daoud Kuttub wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Despite the appearance of political stalemate on the Palestinian-Israeli front, a possible breakthrough seems closer than in the past."

Yossi Ben-Aharon, who was director-general of the Prime Minister's Office under former prime minister Yitzhak Shamir, argued in popular, pluralist Maariv: "In the war against suicide-bombing terrorists, it is not only inventiveness that is needed, but also the breaking of conventions.... The answer is the expulsion of [terrorists'] families."

Block Quotes:

I. "When Silence Is Deceit"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (April 6): "Ehud Olmert's announcement Monday that the chairman of the Yisrael Beiteinu faction, Avigdor Lieberman, will be a minister in the government is astounding. Moreover, the silence of Labor Party chairman Amir Peretz -- who heard about the future appointment while conducting covert negotiations with Olmert -- is strange. This silence is akin to consent, and it is outrageous. Before the elections, Peretz explicitly stated that he would not agree to sit in a government with Lieberman. Now a few days after he failed in his confused and misguided attempt to establish a right-wing coalition, with National Union as its spine and the settlement rabbis as its enthusiastic supporters, he appears to be someone whose desire to govern spurs him to turn his back on all his principles.... Denouncing Lieberman's platform does not mean ignoring immigrants. On the contrary, it is a call to this extensive population to give up on sectorial voting. Such a call, if accompanied by improved treatment of immigrants based on their needs, is liable to break open sectorial voting in the future. Lieberman, therefore, has no place in the government. What is right for Olmert to do is 10 times more right for Peretz to do. If these two establish an all-inclusive coalition that completely ignores the will of the voter, that government will be forlorn and its days may be numbered."

II. "Prospects For Negotiations"

Palestinian columnist Daoud Kuttub wrote in the

conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (April 6):
"Despite the appearance of political stalemate on the Palestinian-Israeli front, a possible breakthrough seems closer than in the past. Various pieces of the puzzle appear to be falling in place following both the Palestinian and Israel elections.... The key issue will continue to be how the Israelis will want to handle the upcoming talks. If they will act as in the past, the real negotiations will be within Israel or between Israel and Washington. In many ways the threat of turning to the unilateral plan by Ehud Olmert and the threat of turning to Hamas by President Abbas might be just the right formula to get both parties to try and work for an acceptable solution. For the negotiations to work, however, a serious cease-fire agreement (or an understanding like the understanding with Hizbullah) is needed to be followed by confidence-building measures and then serious talks, preferably away from the camera and press leaks."

III. "Expulsions Can't Be Avoided"

Yossi Ben-Aharon, who was director-general of the Prime Minister's Office under former prime minister Yitzhak Shamir, argued in popular, pluralist Maariv (April 6):
"In the war against suicide-bombing terrorists, it is not only inventiveness that is needed, but also the breaking of conventions.... The answer is the expulsion of [terrorists'] families. True, we tried this in the past, took in harsh criticism from the world, and desisted. [But] circumstances have changed since then. Suicide bombing has become a contagious disease, for which its victims in the West have found no solution.... [Yet], the US is deporting terrorists and suspects to the Guantanamo, Cuba, detention center.... Families [of terrorists held by Israel] would be sent aboard Israel Navy ships ... to the shores of Saudi Arabia, Sudan, or Syria. Those countries are notorious for their financial and political support for Hamas."

2. US-Israel Relations:

Summary:

Prof. Uzi Arad, the Director of the Institute of Policy and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Center, who was a senior advisor to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "In coordinating the next foreign policy moves with the US, including a possible evacuation of territories, the challenge that faces Israel is to further upgrade the relations, including the strategic relations."

Block Quotes:

"Processes and Leveraging Them"

Prof. Uzi Arad, the Director of the Institute of Policy and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Center, who was a senior advisor to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (April 6): "The foremost instrument that served to upgrade [US-Israeli] relations was leveraging power.... In return for the disengagement from Gaza, Sharon extricated declarative diplomatic achievements from the US. Now, in coordinating the next foreign policy moves with the US, including a possible evacuation of territories, the challenge that faces Israel is to further upgrade the relations, including the strategic relations. After all, the US has always supported safe, defensible and recognized borders for Israel, but these were based on the 1967 borders with slight revisions, which are now also required by the Clinton and Bush formulae. If Israel gradually pulls back to these lines, then the understanding with the US should not only be expressed in giving these lines a seal of approval, but something essential should also be given in return. This is not a simple objective, particularly since there are those in the US who ... are pushing in the opposite direction -- to minimize Israel's standing and distance Washington from it. The agenda between the two countries is also complex, and focuses on the joint effort to cope with the Iranian threat. But in the upcoming timeframe, with a friendly president like George Bush serving in Washington, as well as the existing infrastructure of the relations and broad support in public opinion (Jewish and Christian) -- all these afford Israel a basis for leveraging that could upgrade the relations, institutionalize them and their content, perhaps to the highest level. This is the challenge to which [Israel]

should aspire, despite the opposing currents."

13. Trial of Former Liberian President Charles Taylor:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "It is encouraging to see international law being applied as it should be ... rather than seeing it manipulated as in the unwarranted hounding of Israeli officers in a double-standards witch-hunt."

Block Quotes:

"Courting Justice"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (April 6): "It is encouraging to see international law being applied as it should be -- when there actually are reasonable grounds on which to prosecute suspects -- rather than seeing it manipulated as in the unwarranted hounding of Israeli officers in a double-standards witch-hunt. Beyond the moral imperative to bring Milosevic, Saddam and Taylor to justice, and for each to bear the consequences of his actions, there is the equally essential element of deterrence.... Ultimately, the goal is to see justice served in the broadest sense possible, and that means balancing the benefits and strains of a local process versus a trial in a neutral setting. If local officials feel a war crimes trial could destabilize society then, as in the case of Taylor, the trial should be held elsewhere. Doing so will not change the evidence but should result in justice being done, and being seen to be done."

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